AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS

Please cancel claim 2 without prejudice, amend claims 1, 3 and 7, and add new claims 8-10 as follows.

1. (Currently amended) A hanger assembly for suspending an external store from an aircraft comprising:

a band for coupling to an external store and including an arcuate center panel having first and second ends and outer and inner arcuate surfaces, wherein the band further includes first and second arcuate side panels each having first and second ends, wherein the first end of the center panel is in hinged connection to the first end of the first side panel and the second end of the center panel is in hinged connection to the first end of the second panel, wherein the outer surface of the center panel includes an interface for engagement with an attachment mechanism of an aircraft, wherein the side panels are rotatable at the hinged connection to place the band in a substantially circular configuration where the second ends of the first and second panels face each other and are substantially diametrically opposed to the interface; and

a fastening means for coupling the ends of the first and second panels to each other when the band is disposed in a substantially circular configuration,

wherein the band has a predetermined longitudinal length, thickness and material strength, and the fastening means is adjustable for applying a predetermined radial loading to a substantially circular portion of an external store disposed in relation to the hanger assembly so that the band substantially encircles and contacts the circular portion of the external store to secure the external store to the hanger assembly, such that a maximum bending moment caused by loading on the hanger assembly with the external store secured thereto is located at a region of the band other than at the

interface ~~the fastening means is adjustable to apply a predetermined radial loading to an external store substantially encircled by the band~~.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently amended) The hanger assembly of claim ~~2~~ 1, wherein the band has a longitudinal length of between about 8 and 15 inches, where the maximum bending moment is located adjacent to an edge of the band.

4. (Original) The hanger assembly of claim 1, wherein the band has a longitudinal length of between about 8 and 15 inches.

5. (Original) The hanger assembly of claim 1, wherein the band has a thickness of between about 0.190 and 0.375 inches.

6. (Original) The hanger assembly of claim 1, wherein the band, the interface and the fastening means include high strength steel.

7. (Currently amended) The hanger assembly of claim 1, wherein the center panel further defines an aperture extending from the outer surface to the inner surface of the center panel, wherein the aperture is of a predetermined cross-section sufficient for receiving therethrough ~~through which~~ a hardware interface for electrically interconnecting ~~can be established between~~ the external store secured by the band to the hanger assembly with ~~and~~ the attachment mechanism of the aircraft to which the interface of the center panel is for engagement, wherein the maximum bending moment caused by loading on the hanger assembly with the external store secured thereto is located at a region of the band other than at the aperture~~, and wherein, when the hanger assembly is secured about the external store, the band has a longitudinal length, thickness and material strength sufficient to locate the maximum bending moment at a region of the band other than the region defining the aperture~~.

8. (New) The hanger assembly of claim 1, wherein the each of the arcuate side panels has a conformal profile.

9. (New) A system for suspending an external store from an aircraft comprising:

an aircraft including an attachment mechanism; and

a hanger assembly coupled to an external store and the attachment mechanism, wherein the hangar assembly includes a band including an arcuate center panel having first and second ends and outer and inner arcuate surfaces, wherein the band further includes first and second arcuate side panels each having first and second ends, wherein the first end of the center panel is in hinged connection to the first end of the first side panel and the second end of the center panel is in hinged connection to the first end of the second panel, wherein the outer surface of the center panel includes an interface engaged with the attachment mechanism of the aircraft, wherein the side panels are rotatable at the hinged connection to place the band in a substantially circular configuration where the second ends of the first and second panels face each other and are substantially diametrically opposed to the interface; and

a fastening means for coupling the ends of the first and second panels to each other when the band is disposed in a substantially circular configuration,

wherein the band has a predetermined longitudinal length, thickness and material strength, and the fastening means is adjustable for applying a predetermined radial loading to a substantially circular portion of the external store disposed in relation to the hanger assembly so that the band substantially encircles and contacts the circular portion of the external store to secure the external store to the hanger assembly, such that a maximum bending moment caused by loading on the hanger assembly with the

external store secured thereto is located at a region of the band other than at the interface.

10. (New) The system of claim 9, wherein the center panel further defines an aperture extending from the outer surface to the inner surface of the center panel, wherein the aperture is of a predetermined cross-section sufficient for receiving therethrough a hardware interface for electrically interconnecting the external store with the aircraft, wherein the maximum bending moment caused by loading on the hanger assembly with the external store secured thereto is located at a region of the band other than at the aperture.